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Chairman: Mr. MURPHY (Ireland)
Vice-Chairman

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (A/50/25, A/50/171, A/50/182-E/1995/66 and Corr.1, A/50/254-S/1995/501, A/50/366, A/50/371, A/50/400, A/50/407, A/50/425/S/1995/787, A/50/475, A/50/518, A/C.2/50/2)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (A/50/3, A/50/74 and Add.1, A/50/218, A/50/453, A/50/515)

(b) DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT (A/50/220/E/1995/99, A/50/347, A/50/516)

1. Ms. WALLER-HUNTER (Director, Division for Sustainable Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General containing the proposals on the format, scope and organizational aspects of the 1997 special session of the General Assembly on the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21 (A/50/454), said that it defined the overall context in which the session would be prepared and presented proposals concerning the scope of the discussions, as well as organizational matters. In that regard, the outcome of the General Assembly's deliberations on an agenda for development and the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its most recent session on the coordinated follow-up of major conferences were of crucial importance.

2. As for the scope of the discussions, the report mentioned, among other priorities, the need to determine the critical areas of sustainability for the years to come. That would require a comprehensive review of the progress achieved at all levels in the implementation of the Rio commitments, taking into account also the relevant conclusions of subsequent global conferences. Such a review would also identify the major concerns, constraints and gaps. The objective would be to maintain the political momentum and to give a clear sense of direction for future action to be taken by Governments, intergovernmental bodies and major groups with a view to achieving sustainable development.

3. At its special session, the General Assembly might also wish to consider the institutional arrangements to be put in place for follow-up to the Rio process, based on current arrangements. It might also give guidance concerning the priorities to be established by the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as the timetable for the next review. The Secretary-General's report also contained recommendations concerning the format of documentation for the session. The Second Committee might reflect upon the proposal to prepare a comprehensive report on the overall assessment of the progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as well as recommendations for action. Governments might submit country profiles which would enable the progress achieved at national level to be assessed.

4. As far as the organizational aspects of the session were concerned, the report proposed a duration of five working days. The session could be organized as a self-standing event to be held before the fifty-second session of the General Assembly; alternatively, consideration could be given to building the review exercise into the fifty-second session itself. If the first alternative were retained, the Secretary-General proposed that the session should be held in

the second half of June 1997 or immediately after the 1997 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The report also emphasized that the General Assembly should fix a high level of representation commensurate with that secured for the Rio Conference, which 118 Heads of State and Government had attended. Major groups had played a very important role at the Conference itself and in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In principle, the rules of procedure of the General Assembly did not allow the active participation of major groups in its deliberations. The report therefore proposed several options that would allow an active dialogue to be established with their representatives in the context of the special session. Lastly, the report outlined various ways of organizing the preparatory process. For example, the Commission on Sustainable Development could, at its fifth session, undertake an in-depth evaluation of the progress achieved and identify major concerns and gaps in the achievement of the objectives set.

5. Mr. DIALLO (Executive Secretary, Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa) introduced documents A/50/74 and A/50/74/Add.1 containing the reports of the sixth and seventh sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee, held respectively in New York in January 1995 and at Nairobi in August 1995; document A/50/515 containing the report of the Secretary-General on the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification and supplementing the report on the same subject submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session; and document A/50/616 on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 49/115 on the observance of a World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought and setting out ways and means by which the Secretariat could assist the countries concerned in observing that event, within the limits of its resources.

6. So far, 115 States or regional integration organizations had signed the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and 10 States had ratified it. The Convention would enter into force on the ninetieth day after the date of deposit of the fiftieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession. However, various activities had already been undertaken within the context of the interim period, particularly with regard to national and regional consultation. For instance, with the support of the Secretariat, national days of information and awareness-raising had been organized in 20 countries, aimed as much at decision makers as at the general public. That was only a first step, however. The consultation process would continue at the community level in order to secure a genuine dialogue between all interested partners and, if the Secretariat had sufficient funds for the purpose, the process would be broadened to include the other African countries concerned and countries of Asia and Latin America that had shown great interest in such an operation.

7. At the subregional level, seminars convened under the auspices of African subregional organizations had brought together representatives of the Governments of each subregion, donor countries and competent intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, with the support of the Secretariat. In addition to those held under the auspices of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), other meetings would be organized under the

auspices of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Consultations were also planned for the Gulf States and the States of Latin America and the Caribbean.

8. At its seventh session, the Intergovernmental Committee had begun preparatory work for the 1st meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Two working groups had been set up, the first responsible for the identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism, the designation of a permanent secretariat, and the programme and budget, and the second responsible for matters relating to the organization of scientific and technological cooperation (in particular the establishment of the Committee on Science and Technology), the rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties, and procedures for communication of information and review of implementation of the Convention. Implementation measures and conciliation and arbitration procedures would be discussed at the eighth session. Considerable progress had been made on key issues, chiefly by virtue of the spirit of compromise shown by all delegations. With regard to the designation of a permanent secretariat, Germany, Kenya, Spain and Switzerland had offered to host the headquarters. As far as administrative arrangements were concerned, the Secretary-General had been requested to submit a report on possible support from the Organization for the permanent secretariat.

9. The Intergovernmental Committee had also addressed the question of extrabudgetary resources to finance the running of the secretariat. It had expressed concern at the financial situation, especially the level of the Special Voluntary Fund for the participation of developing countries, and had requested the Chairman of the Committee, in consultation with the Executive Secretary, to bring the matter to the attention of Member States. To date, available resources were estimated at almost $230,000, largely made up of contributions from Japan and Ireland; contributions totalling $360,000 had been pledged by Norway, Sweden and Italy.

10. In conclusion, he urged all States that had not yet done so to accede to or ratify the Convention so that it could enter into force by the end of the first half of 1996, prior to the convening of the special session of the General Assembly.

11. Mr. JUMA (Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity) said that the 1st meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in Nassau in late 1994, had marked the launching of activities to implement the Convention. The Conference had decided on a number of institutional arrangements, resolved certain financial questions, approved the establishment of a Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and adopted a medium-term programme of work for the years ahead. It had also recommended that the date of entry into force of the Convention should be proclaimed International Day for Biological Diversity.

12. With regard to financial resources and mechanisms, the Conference had decided that the Global Environment Facility (GEF) should continue to serve as the institutional structure to operate the financial mechanism under the Convention on an interim basis; it had authorized the Secretariat to consult with the restructured Facility on the content of a memorandum of understanding

to be considered at its 2nd meeting to be held in Jakarta in November 1995, and, lastly, it had requested the Secretariat to submit a report on the financial mechanism and a study on the availability of financial resources additional to those provided through the Facility and on ways and means of mobilizing those resources in support of the objectives of the Convention. The Subsidiary Body whose establishment it had approved had already held its first meeting and prepared a draft medium-term programme of work to be submitted to the Conference at its 2nd meeting, when its recommendations would also be considered.

13. The Conference of the Parties had also stressed the need to establish links with other bodies with a view to promoting coherent and urgent attention to biological diversity issues. In particular, it had attached great importance to the development of a substantive relationship with the Commission on Sustainable Development and had drawn the attention of the General Assembly to the complementarity of the Commission's mandate with its own.

14. To date, 131 countries had ratified the Convention. Activities at country level were even more significant in terms of their number and scale: 20 countries had adopted or intended to adopt legislation on access to genetic resources and numerous institutional reforms had been undertaken to improve the coordination of activities relating to biological diversity.

15. The importance of national activities would be one of the key topics for discussion at the 2nd meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which had been preceded by regional meetings on Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the countries in transition, and by a global meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Biosafety.

16. In conclusion, he reiterated the importance of the Convention as an instrument which served as the basis for national activities to promote a sustainable form of development.

17. Mr. OLEMBO (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) introduced the report of the UNEP Governing Council (A/50/25) and documents A/50/227 containing the report of the Executive Director of UNEP on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, A/50/171 on the strengthening of UNEP and A/50/171 containing the report of the Governing Council on Earthwatch, environment monitoring and assessment.

18. When it had adopted Agenda 21, the international community had been aware that achieving the goals of sustainable and environmentally sound development would not be an easy task. Three years after the Rio Conference, the same problems persisted or had even worsened. Realizing the need to move beyond the period of reflection to that of policy-making and integration of the issues raised in the Agenda for Peace and the agenda for development, the Governing Council, at its eighteenth session, had decided to strengthen the role of UNEP as the primary environmental agent in the United Nations system.

19. Among other measures, it had decided that UNEP should give priority to assessing and addressing critical environmental issues and promoting international cooperation. It had also decided to give greater emphasis to the provision of technical assistance to developing countries and countries in

transition (particularly through the formulation of regional strategies), and to support the development of international environmental law. In that respect, it had authorized the Executive Director to convene, together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an intergovernmental negotiating committee with a mandate to develop an international legally binding instrument for the application of the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals in international trade. It had also endorsed the adoption of an integrated approach to programme formulation and implementation that focused on four major themes: sustainable management and use of natural resources; sustainable production and consumption; health and environment; and globalization of the environment. That approach would provide a framework for addressing issues raised at recent United Nations conferences in the social and economic fields.

20. The Governing Council had clarified the relationship between UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development, UNDP, other United Nations agencies and bodies, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The objectives of sustainable development and the protection of the environment were attainable only if they were integrated into social and economic development policies. There was always the danger, however, that competing claims would arise among the various players in the sustainable development arena. The Commission on Sustainable Development acted as the high-level policy forum for discussions that followed up the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The role of UNEP was to bring the environmental dimension to the debate through the provision of scientific, technical and policy information and advice, while its work programme provided the right framework for an integrated response to the concerns of the Commission on Sustainable Development. By endorsing the establishment of the Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group and the preparation of a strategy document in the field of the environment, the Governing Council had underlined the central coordinating role of UNEP in that connection.

21. UNEP had also concluded two partnership agreements with UNDP: one to help combat desertification and the other to increase the flow of information on environment and development in developing countries. A third agreement on capacity-building was under way. Those agreements would encourage complementarity between UNEP and UNDP, the latter being the coordinator of technical cooperation at the country level, while UNEP was the primary source for environmental expert advice.

22. UNEP and UNDP were also working together to combat desertification by combining their comparative advantages. UNEP, which had played a notable role in the negotiation process for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, aimed to place greater emphasis on the social dimension of the issue. It hoped that the Conference of the Parties would choose Nairobi to host the secretariat of the Convention.

23. UNEP had wide experience in hosting conferences and the secretariats of various conventions and made its conference services and facilities available for their use. It was host to the Earthwatch secretariat and was also the co-sponsor of numerous global activities. In addition, it was making continuous

efforts to make its meetings schedule more efficient by programming meetings back to back.

24. The Governing Council had endorsed the proposals of the Executive Director for more transparent and efficient management and administrative support structures. It had asked the Executive Director to propose different options on the governance of UNEP for consideration at its nineteenth session.

25. The integrated UNEP work programme for the biennium 1996-1997, which reflected a consensus, was the product of extensive consultations with Governments and external partners. It emphasized the interrelationships between social and economic driving forces, the environment and the quality of life. For each subprogramme, detailed plans had been developed that encompassed strategic partnerships with Governments, consumers' unions, regional development banks, regional commissions and non-governmental organizations. Special attention would be given to the problems faced by developing countries, particularly small island States and selected megacities. Emphasis would also be placed on assessing the driving forces that contributed to unsustainable production and consumption patterns, in which connection UNEP should promote consumer awareness. The work programme was geared towards enabling UNEP to make the best use of its comparative advantages: global and regional assessment and reporting, data and information management and the servicing of regional environment and natural resources information networks.

26. The unanswered question that remained, however, was whether the financial situation would allow for the implementation of that programme. The budgetary envelope for the biennium 1996-1997 was only US$ 90-105 million, which was US$ 30 million less than the previous one. That downward trend recorded over the last three budgets and the absence of links between financial commitments and programming had aroused concerns and led to questioning as to whether environmental concerns had been recognized as having equal importance with social and economic concerns. The Governing Council had again called on all Governments to contribute voluntarily to the Environment Fund in time to permit implementation of the planned activities. One principle was paramount: no decision on global activities should be taken unless accompanied by an absolute guarantee of financing. Despite its meagre resources, UNEP none the less pledged to do its utmost to help in solving the problems that constantly emerged in the field of the environment.

27. Mr. NYAMBI (Director, Office to Combat Desertification and Drought), introducing the Secretary-General's report entitled "Environment and sustainable development: desertification and drought" (A/50/347), stressed that the United Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, had adequately captured the concerns contained in Agenda 21, chapter 12, and provided a legal framework that would reverse land degradation in such countries.

28. The adoption, signature and ratification of the Convention were the culmination of several years of effort. It was now essential, however, to mobilize the international community with a view to ensuring its effective implementation. Given the size of the problem, the resources contributed and the activities initiated were far below the scale necessary. The cost of

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inaction would impose even greater burdens, since the international community would have to cope with the consequences, such as civil strife, mass migration, hunger, food insecurity and loss of biodiversity. It was therefore urgent that the efforts of developing countries affected by desertification and drought should be supported.

29. Successful implementation of the Convention would require diligence in operationalizing the innovative funding strategies and mechanisms, particularly the global mechanism, which was currently being refined. The development of mechanisms for channelling resources to the most afflicted populations was of crucial importance, in which connection the national desertification funds could play an effective role.

30. Effective partnerships should also be built: the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) had sought to establish new forms of collaboration with FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank and other multilateral organizations. It had also continued its collaboration with previous partners. Moreover, together with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Club du Sahel, it had recently organized a meeting for the exchange of information on implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa.

31. Since the previous session of the Second Committee, and in application of Economic and Social Council resolution 95/24, UNSO had been reorganized and was currently, within UNDP, the body responsible for all questions associated with desertification and drought. It was now called the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought.

32. Since the adoption of the Convention, the Office had allocated several million dollars to the support of national action programmes, subregional and regional activities and capacity strengthening; those funds included resources from the indicative planning figures (IPF), the UNSO Trust Fund, other UNDP funds, and the contributions of bilateral donors.

33. For seven years, the international community had been concerned by the problem of desertification and drought. For seven years, 900 million people affected by or vulnerable to that scourge had been waiting for support and field-level action. Since the Convention would not yield concrete results in the affected areas until it entered into force in 1997, it was essential to take immediate steps to increase action at the local level.

34. Mr. ALVAREZ (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) occupied a unique place in the field of international cooperation. In Rio, a global partnership had been formed for the achievement of sustainable development and higher quality of life for all people, and all the participants had declared their full support for the achievement of the goals of Agenda 21. The developing countries had accepted the awesome responsibilities that Agenda 21 imposed on them because their partners in the developed world had assured them of their full support and coordination. It was, therefore, in that

context that the Group of 77 and China attached the utmost importance to the follow-up activities to UNCED. It was true that a certain number of results had already been achieved, they included the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the adoption of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Barbados Declaration and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the adoption by the Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks of an agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the replenishment of the resources, and restructuring, of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Certainly, those were important achievements, but they were primarily related to the procedural aspects of the implementation of Agenda 21. In Rio, the developing countries had committed themselves to protecting the environment with the assurance that the developed countries would provide them with assistance, but the enthusiasm that had characterized the preparatory process had diminished. The planned activities had been stalled by the lack of resources and the excessive cost of technologies, and the commitments made with regard to the transfer of environmentally sound technologies on concessional terms had not always materialized. It was essential that developing countries should be helped to participate in the fight against environmental deterioration.

35. UNCED had adopted an integrated approach to development and the environment. For the developing countries, economic and social development and the eradication of poverty were the overriding priorities. Those goals could be achieved by means which included the provision of new financial resources, an increase in official development assistance (ODA), improved market access for the export products of developing countries, and a solution to the debt problem. He noted, however, that there was a continuing decline in ODA, which called in question the achievement of the goals of Agenda 21. It was, moreover, regrettable that while the Rio commitments concerning financial resources, trade and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies had not materialized, the developing countries were being subjected to restrictive trade and investment policies.

36. More attention must be devoted to the discussions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, whose responsibility it was to ensure follow-up on the recommendations of UNCED and to offer guidance in the formulation of national, subregional and regional policies on sustainable development.

37. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in 1997 would be an opportunity to examine and assess the results of Agenda 21 and to identify successes and failures. The fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development should therefore be devoted to preparations for the special session, and paragraphs 22, 23 and 24 of document A/50/453 mentioned a number of documents which might be prepared for that session.

38. UNEP had a central role to play in the field of the environment within the United Nations system. Closer coordination with the Commission on Sustainable Development should increase the efficiency of the work of both bodies. The decisions of the Governing Council of UNEP should also contribute to a more coordinated implementation of Agenda 21. However, the continuing decline in

contributions to the Programme, despite the increased responsibilities imposed on it by Agenda 21, was a matter for concern.

39. In order for the developing countries to implement the decisions under the Convention on Biological Diversity, they must be given access to biotechnologies; the developed countries must also adopt a more constructive approach to their developing country partners with a view to the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of biological resources.

40. The Group of 77 and China called for the signature and ratification of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and requested the international community to provide the necessary resources and support for its implementation.

41. Mr. AGUIRRE de CÁRCER (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that important progress had been made during the past year in the areas of the environment and sustainable development. The European Union welcomed that progress and would continue to promote international cooperation in that field.

42. The review and evaluation of Agenda 21 in 1997 would be an opportunity to renew the commitments made in Rio and to give a new impetus to sustainable development. The special session planned for that purpose should produce a negotiated political declaration which would set out future actions and priorities with a view to the promotion of sustainable development. A number of institutional issues relating to the programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development would have to be examined at that session, but it was important not to give disproportionate attention to such matters; the Economic and Social Council might also examine them.

43. The report of the Secretary-General on that question had defined the basic modalities for the organization of the session, and the more substantive issues should be examined at a later stage. In that regard, it was important to take advantage of the preparatory work of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its 1996 sessions. It would be desirable to set a high level of political participation and to organize the special session as a separate event; the participation of non-governmental organizations and other major groups would also contribute to its success.

44. The success of the eighteenth session of the Governing Council of UNEP reflected a broad consensus for strengthening its role within the United Nations system in the field of the environment. The identification of priorities for its programme of work and the review of its governing structures should enable it to improve the effectiveness of its activities. The European Union was also pleased that the Council had reaffirmed the importance that it attached to providing support to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

45. The European Union welcomed the outcome of the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, particularly the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, which had laid out a programme of work to be implemented by 1997. It would be useful for Governments and international and non-governmental organizations to organize activities in relation to the work of the Panel.

46. The European Union reaffirmed its commitment to contribute actively to the preparations for the 1996 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, when questions relating to the atmosphere and oceans would be discussed. In that context, it hoped that the seventh Conference of Parties of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, to be held in Vienna in late 1995, would lead to decisions that would prevent stratospheric ozone depletion. It also hoped that the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources, which was to be adopted at the intergovernmental conference currently under way in Washington, would receive broad support and would be implemented as soon as possible.

47. The signing of the Convention to Combat Desertification by over 100 countries bore witness to the importance which the international community attached to that issue. The European Union supported its early entry into force; its member States were in the process of conducting their internal procedures for its ratification.

48. The consideration, during the meetings of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification, of reports on measures taken or planned for Africa was evidence of the firm commitment of Governments and organizations to support the countries affected. Measures for Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the northern Mediterranean were also encouraging.

49. The European Union reaffirmed its strong commitment to the full implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and would make every effort to ensure a successful outcome of the second Conference of Parties, which was to take place in Indonesia. It would also take part in the discussions on the safe transfer, handling and use of any living modified organism resulting from biotechnology.

50. Mr. SAMARASINGHE (Sri Lanka) said that his country was firmly committed to achieving sustainable development within the context of measures to alleviate poverty by adopting a strategy to ensure economic growth and enhance social justice, as well as to protect the environment. Sri Lanka firmly associated itself with action taken by the international community in that direction and especially with the efforts to implement Agenda 21.

51. In order to protect the environment and implement Agenda 21, his Government had established several institutional mechanisms for the implementation of programmes envisaged by the Rio Conference. The Ministry of the Environment, established in 1990, had been strengthened and currently functioned as a policy-making body. It had established a number of cells to monitor different programmes, including a unit on Agenda 21.

52. Despite the consensus achieved in Rio on the need for global action, many obstacles still remained. Progress had been held back, in the developed countries, by a lack of political will and, in the developing countries, by a lack of resources, compounded by the inability of those countries to procure the external resources needed to acquire appropriate technology.

to simplify the requirements in that area as far as possible and to produce user-friendly documents.

64. The United Nations system must continue its support for sustainable development, in particular, for projects in small island developing States, and the international community must reaffirm its commitment to the principles it had made a commitment to implement at Rio.

65. Mr. ZIMIANIN (Russian Federation) said that his delegation had studied with interest the report of the Secretary-General on the organization of the 1997 special session (A/50/495) and subscribed to the overall evaluation of the activities undertaken by the Commission on Sustainable Development pursuant to the decisions taken at the Rio Conference, and, in particular, the conclusion that, from the political standpoint, the Commission had succeeded in maintaining a high level of participation by securing the participation of ministers and senior officials in its work, as well as representatives of major groups involved in the promotion of sustainable development.

66. He expressed satisfaction that the Commission had considered issues relating to sustainable consumption and production patterns and the development of indicators on sustainable development, as well as the complex problems linked to funding and the transfer of environmental technologies. It was clear that those questions should be taken into account during the work of the special session. There should also be a rational division of responsibilities among the main United Nations bodies, and cooperation between them should be enhanced in the context of the follow-up to the Rio Conference. He welcomed the emerging agreement regarding the respective functions of the Commission and UNEP, as well as the outcome of the consideration by its Governing Council at its eighteenth session of the future programme of action of UNEP. It was to be hoped that the comparative advantages of the Commission and the Programme and the experience they had acquired would enable them to strengthen their cooperation.

67. With regard to the decisions adopted by the Governing Council of UNEP at its eighteenth session, he said he welcomed, in particular, the decision to consider the issue of strengthening environmental monitoring. The recommendations on that subject, especially those aimed at strengthening the role of the United Nations within Earthwatch, should be approved and implemented. The issue of environmental monitoring should be considered in greater depth by other organs and in the context of the consideration of activities carried out by the United Nations system in the field of sustainable development.

68. The Commission on Sustainable Development must be closely involved in the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly, particularly in view of the fact that, in 1997, it was to carry out an overall review of progress made in that area. As far as the organizational aspects of the session were concerned, his delegation could subscribe to the idea of holding the special session separately from the fifty-second session. The date proposed in the report - June 1997 - would be acceptable. Given the prominent role which the Commission on Sustainable Development would play in the preparations for the session, it would be useful to set up a separate preparatory committee with the sole task of drafting the final document. It would also be necessary to carry

but a thorough review, at the regional level, of the topics to be discussed at the special session. Finally, as the Secretary-General recommended in his report, representatives of major groups - non-governmental organizations, scientists and the private sector - should be involved as closely as possible in the work of the special session.

69. Mr. LOZANO (Mexico) said that, in the three years since the Rio Conference, significant progress had been made in implementing the agreements which had been reached. The past year had been especially important with regard to the drafting of instruments on the environment and the strengthening of international legal standards in that area. Mexico was convinced, however, that environmental issues should be considered in the wider context of sustainable development, which encompassed economic growth, social development and international peace and security. In that area much remained to be done. Indeed, some of the fundamental principles of the Rio Conference were still not fully applied. The focus had been on environmental protection at the expense of the social and economic aspects.

70. It was a cause of particular concern that, in some cases, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility was not being applied and that certain countries were not respecting their commitments. Mexico was also concerned at the tendency to create new categories of States in order to impose obligations on them which bore no relation to the multilateral agreements which had been concluded. Furthermore, the lack of clear rules determining the responsibility of States with regard to environmental issues was a source of conflict. National regulations were often aimed at protecting the economic interests of the country, rather than the environment, and, in most cases, they had an impact beyond national boundaries. Finally, the trend towards negative interpretations of the precautionary principle was also of some concern.

71. Despite its economic difficulties, Mexico, for its part, had always striven to reconcile economic growth and environmental protection by basing itself on the principle that the rational use of natural resources was one of the essential conditions in the struggle against poverty, and that the protection of the environment and of natural resources must involve changes in the patterns of consumption and the rigorous application of regulations.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.